

**Remarks of
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to the
TRUCKLOAD CARRIERS ASSOCIATION
ANNUAL SAFETY AND SECURITY DIVISION MEETING
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On behalf of President Bush and Transportation Secretary Mineta, I want to thank you for inviting me to be here with you today. This afternoon I want to bring you up to date on the Federal government's efforts to maintain and improve safety on our Nation's highways.

Safety Goal

Safety is at the very heart of what we do at the U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT) and Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration (FMCSA). DOT has set an aggressive goal of decreasing fatalities on our nation's highways. We are committed to reducing the fatality rate by 41 percent from 1996 to 2008.

We are encouraged that the fatality rate dropped last year and alcohol-related crashes are down from 2003. Still, 42,800 people died on the nation's highways in 2004, up slightly from 2003, according to preliminary projections. And, nearly 5,000 of those deaths involved commercial vehicles. We know that it's particularly challenging for motor carriers to bring down the fatality rate, because the truck miles traveled are increasing faster than vehicle miles.

Traffic crashes also put an estimated \$230 billion strain on our economy each year. This clearly contributes to the bigger picture of how transportation safety impacts the nation's economic growth.

Fatigue Management

FMCSA is collaborating with Transport Canada to develop a comprehensive North American Fatigue Management Program. The program is intended to help carriers, drivers, and their families better recognize fatigue. And, we will provide guidelines on effective countermeasures, such as treatment of sleep disorders and scheduling. We're also providing motor carriers ways to measure the program's effectiveness.

In addition, we have been studying fatigue management technologies in partnership with Transport Canada, the National Highway Transportation Safety Administration, and the American Transportation Research Institute. We're generating two reports from this research. The first one is due out soon. It examines the effectiveness of a combination of technological aids for helping drivers fight fatigue while on the road.

The second report is due out by early next year. It considers the effectiveness of a promising new drowsy-driver monitoring device. Plus, we will continue to assess new technologies as they

become available. The primary goal of our fatigue management effort, of course, is to prevent fatigue-related crashes.

Medical Issues

Ensuring driver fitness goes well beyond managing fatigue. At FMCSA we're currently doing a lot of work on advancing our medical program. The quality of drivers' medical certification has been an issue for a long time, for both the enforcement community and motor carriers.

We want to be sure truck drivers are carrying proper, legal medical cards, issued by examiners who fully understand Federal requirements. Currently, the system is vulnerable to abuse on several levels.

FMCSA has initiatives underway to improve the certification of drivers and the documentation to back it up. Congress has been very supportive of this effort.

One initiative would enable us to require medical practitioners to be trained and ensure they are properly qualified to examine truckers for their medical cards. Their names would be included in a National Registry of Certified Medical Examiners, so carriers and drivers would be able to locate certified examiners close to them. Pending Congressional approval in the reauthorization bill, this would take effect in 2007.

The next initiative would ultimately do away with the medical card, replacing it with electronic records that can be accessed easily by law enforcement personnel, even at roadside inspections. Our proposal is to merge truck drivers' medical information with the commercial driver's license data system. This is already being done in two States — Indiana and Arizona. We will introduce the rulemaking in 2006 as the first step toward creating this program nationwide.

These initiatives are tied to our creation of a Medical Review Board, which will consist of five medical experts who will advise FMCSA on standards and long-term planning for our medical program. We are currently reviewing candidates, and we expect to have this panel begin work on various issues this fall. This will help us move forward more efficiently on other medical initiatives.

Drug and Alcohol Testing

Closely tied to medical issues are drug and alcohol usage, since they all impact drivers' physical fitness for duty. Alcohol usage among truck drivers has always been low. The industry has done a great job of keeping the usage rate under one-half of 1 percent.

We're still concerned about drug usage, however. This rate has hovered at around two percent for some time. I know this is a challenge for you, because it's hard to control the actions of others, especially when they're off duty.

The Federal standards for drug usage among truck drivers are fairly strict — but appropriate. At FMCSA, we're committed to driving down drug and alcohol usage as far as we can. Our objective is to help carriers achieve a less-than-1-percent rate for positive drug tests. This would

allow us to reduce the random testing requirement from 50 to 25 percent of your drivers, which helps your productivity and your bottom line.

We want to work with you to meet this important goal. We have a number of staff experts in drug and alcohol policies who are stationed at various FMCSA division offices throughout the country. Please contact our headquarters or our office nearest to you if you need guidance.

SafeStat

Data quality impacts almost all of our activities. FMCSA's enforcement efforts rely heavily on timely and accurate data to better identify high-risk motor carriers for investigation. The more complete, timely, and accurate our data is — and the more efficient our data systems are — the better our ability to PREVENT violations and crashes.

One of our primary tools for analyzing data is the Motor Carrier Safety Status Measurement System, or SafeStat. Using compliance and enforcement data, SafeStat accurately identifies carriers that pose the greatest risk to safety.

However, it can be even better. Starting last year, we have been assessing the quality of State safety data. Many States do an excellent job of managing their data, while others are experiencing some difficulties. We have been working with the States that have data problems, and they are improving. Currently, more than half meet our standards for providing good data quality, which is up from just 16 States a year ago.

We're also looking closely at data quality within our own operations. As many of you know, last year we decided to temporarily remove the Accident Safety Evaluation Area, or SEA, and the overall SafeStat scores from our Web site. The Accident SEA and SafeStat scores will be reposted as soon as we know the supporting data is accurate and uploaded on a timely basis. In the meantime, carriers still can access their own scores.

I encourage you to help us in this effort by working with your State officials to ensure the data is correct and timely. DataQs, FMCSA's Web-based system, was created to help you do this. It forwards data concerns to the appropriate State records office for resolution. And, it tracks data concerns until they are resolved. To find out more and to use Data Qs, log on to FMCSA's Web site.

Crash Causation Study

FMCSA is very close to completing another major data-driven initiative, the Large Truck Crash Causation Study. The Crash Causation Study is a remarkably thorough analysis of fatal and injury-related truck crashes over nearly three years, from 2001 to 2003. For each of nearly 1,000 crashes, researchers have analyzed about 1,000 variables, involving drivers, vehicles, roadways, and environment. By determining the predominant causes of these crashes, our goal is to identify ways to prevent them.

The researchers have examined the critical events and reasons for each crash, and early indications are that we need to focus on driver behavior and performance. Unlike other large studies, we're not publishing one, final report. Instead, we're releasing different aspects of the

data and findings periodically through a series of Analysis Briefs. The first one on methodology will be published this month. Next, we will release the entire database electronically this July. We will keep releasing briefs throughout the year.

Safety Belts

Finally, I'd like to bring you up to date on one of the DOT's highest safety priorities — safety belts. The Bush administration is proud that we have raised the national safety belt usage rate to 80 percent — the highest level ever. This is estimated to save more than 15,000 lives and prevent \$50 billion in economic costs every year.

However, a recent study by FMCSA showed that only 48 percent of truck and bus drivers buckle up. In 2003, 620 truck drivers died in crashes, more than 170 of whom were ejected from their cabs. And, almost 80 percent of those drivers were not wearing safety belts. This is even more dramatic in light of the recently reported projection that truck-related fatalities increased in 2004.

At DOT, we're trying to increase safety belt use among ALL drivers in two ways. FMCSA is asking CMV drivers to buckle up. The more drivers realize the benefits of wearing a safety belt, the more lives will be saved. And, we're doing everything we can to encourage more States to pass primary safety belt laws, which have proven effective wherever they exist. I encourage you to make sure your drivers buckle up.

Close

I want to thank you again for the opportunity to be here today.